

Strategies for Improving Team Decision Making for Assistive Technology

The decision making process used here includes five steps: Problem Identification, Solution Generation, Solution Selection, Implementation, and Follow-up. Suggestions are grouped within those five steps. The right hand column provides suggested strategies.

Problem Identification - If your team has difficulty with problem identification because of...

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| Communication problems... | Ensure that all members understand reports, by adopting a standard protocol data during meetings and for written reports. |
| | Eliminate jargon, numbers without meaning, use of initials, excessive length and fuzziness. |
| | Consider if the team is focused on less important information or factors instead of key problems, and encourage members to reexamine goals and state concerns in different words. |
| | Write key points on a board or chart paper where all team members can see them. |

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| Inappropriate data.... | Review data to insure there is a focus on Student, Environment, and Task before Tools are addressed. |
| | Determine if appropriate disciplines are represented. |
| | Restate the problem, using different words. |
| | Determine if data are sufficient to identify the problems. |
| | Identify additional measures that can gauge progress, such as formal or informal tests, observations, periodic data collection, etc. |

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| Members do not value contributions of others..... | Clarify qualifications, areas of function addressed, types of evaluations and interventions provided by each member. |
| | Ensure that new members are allowed to establish their own credibility. |
| | Help family members recognize the skills of services providers on the team. |
| | Help other team members recognized the family's ability to help gather information from the home environment. |

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| Poor attendance.... | Engage entire team in discussion of their commitment and desire to be on team. |
| | Determine if other assignments are interfering with ability to attend. If so, discuss with administrator. |
| | Determine if one or more member does not want to serve on team, if so, seek administrative support in assigning someone else. |

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| Poor participation during discussions.... | Re-examine team norms for participation and set reasonable expectations. |
| | Ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate. |
| | If length of discussions is a concern, set reasonable time limits. |

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| Too much information gathering.... | Re-examine team norms and if needed, define a “reasonable” time limit for information gathering. |
| | If a “blocker” persists in excessive data collection, give appropriate feedback about the dysfunction of that action. |

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| Too little information gathering.... | Re-examine team norms and identify reasonable expectations for information gathering. |
| | If unrealistic time constraints are being imposed, engage administrator in discussion of alternatives. |
| | If needed, identify additional sources of information such as other service providers, outside agencies, new strategies. |

Generating Solutions: If your team has difficulty with generating solutions because of...

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| too few alternative being generated due to poor participation | Try brainstorming in rotation, with each member giving only one idea at a time regardless of status. |
| | Re-examine the problem statement for clarity, to see that it is stated as a problem and not a solution. |
| | Provide feedback and positive reinforcement for participation. |

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| | Re-examine team norms and identify possible cause of poor participation. |
| | Ensure that there is not negative feedback occurring whether verbal or non verbal, direct or indirect, disguised as humor or straight forward, that is limiting participation. |
| | Set a time limit or change time limit that has been used. |
| | Re-examine meeting style. Overly formal meetings may stifle participation. |
| | Ensure that suggested solutions are written where everyone can see them. |
| | Ensure that solutions are generated without discussion that pulls team away from solution generation. |

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| Too few alternative being generated due to too small a team | If team's size is limited by the district, negotiate to increase the size |
| | If team's size is due to poor attendance, determine and address cause. |
| | If team's size is due to poor attendance because past meetings have been open ended and poorly organized, develop and post agenda with schedule and stick to it. |
| | If team's size is due to a long winded or critical member who may be driving attendance down, provide appropriate feedback to that person. |

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| Lack of support for new ideas... | Re-examine team norms. Too much conformity is dysfunctional if members won't risk being different. |
| | Examine reasons team may have become stale. |
| | Be sure that assessments and suggested solutions take into account the characteristics of the environments. |

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| Lack of knowledge about AT... | Identify specific training needs. |
| | Identify sources of training and technical assistance. |
| | Ensure that members attend workshops and conferences about AT. |
| | Bring in a trainer to focus on identified |

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| | needs. |
| | Set up a vendor fair with several vendors to demonstrate AT. |
| | Acquire resource materials about AT. |
| | Utilize feature match software when appropriate. |

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| Lack of information resources... | Identify and acquire needed resources, e.g., catalogs, textbooks, journals, CDs, DVDs. |
| | Identify useful websites. |
| | Join a list serv such as the one sponsored by Quality Indicators for Assisitve Technology, www.qiat.org to access ongoing information. |

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| Lack of AT devices to try out.... | Seek financial support within your agency to acquire a range of needed AT. |
| | Identify specific equipment and prioritize its acquisition. |
| | Seek private donations for AT for demonstration, training, and trial use. |
| | Identify any local, regional or state sources to borrow AT. |
| | Search all buildings for equipment currently not being used. |

Selecting Solutions-If your team can't reach agreement because of..

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| Lack of understanding of team process... | Devote a session to learning about team process. |
| | Work together to develop a plan to implement key aspects of effective team process. |

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| Rivalry... | Leader at each meeting must work to keep communication flowing and crate an atmosphere of trust. |
| | If it cannot be remedied internally, team should use a process consultant to run a team building session. |

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| Domination by one member... | Write all solutions and details of discussion where everyone can see them to keep team on task. |
| | Re-examine team norms with attention to providing equal opportunities to participate. |

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| | Seek agreement from dominating member to hold back and to encourage others to contribute. |
| | Use self-assessment to raise awareness and begin the process of examining and discussing importance of balanced contributions. |

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| Insufficient knowledge about AT.... | Identify staff development needs and pursue specific training to meet them. |
| | Obtain devices for staff to learn new skills. |
| | Seek sources of comparative information about categories of AT devices. |

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| District policy limits freedom to choose... | Review law to ensure you are in compliance. |
| | Approach administration about concerns and seek a forum to discuss needed changes in policy. |

Implementation-If your selected solutions do not have the expected results during implementation because.....

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| Team member does not perform as expected.... | Ensure team members understand what needs to be done. Review solution selection process to determine that assignments were clear and written where all could see them. |
| | Ensure team members have appropriate resources. |
| | Check to ensure that the team member has the necessary skills in using the AT and in training others. |
| | Review the solution selection process to ensure that decisions were made through consensus because they are more likely to be supported and carried out. |
| | Review all issues as a team, looking for conflict or lack of collaboration. |
| | Ensure that the person who will implement the plan is fully involved in developing the plan, is informed of each step, and has no serious reservations regarding it. |

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| Staff member not on the team does not perform as expected.... | Review what has been done to determine if sufficient training has been provided. |
| | Review what has been done to determine that plan corresponds with IEP and if staff |

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| | person understands legal implications of not implementing IEP. |
| | Ensure that the direct supervisor of the staff person is aware of the difficulties. |

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| AT is not being used.... | Ensure that AT is appropriate to complete meaningful tasks in the environment. |
| | Ensure that all necessary staff know how and when AT should be used. |
| | Talk with student to ensure that student sees the need for the AT, is sufficiently trained, and willing to use it. |
| | Observe to see what is interfering with use. |
| | Determine cause and schedule team meeting to problem solve. A different solution may need to be selected or a more specific plan developed. |

Follow-Up-If your team has problems with follow-up because of.....

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| Invalid role expectations.... | Devote a meeting to issues of responsibilities. Identify problems and develop a plan to remediate. |
| | Write role expectations where everyone can see them, agree via consensus that they are valid. |

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| Poor data keeping... | Devote meeting to developing a plan to improve data collection and analysis. |
| | Locate or develop data collection forms that will meet needs. |
| | Hold regular meetings to review and revise data collection procedures. |
| | Require the presentation of data as a regular part of team follow-up on students using AT. |

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| Failure to follow up on individual students... | Examine team norms. Discuss importance of follow-up. |
| | Change procedures to allow more time to follow-up rather than overloading with new referrals. |
| | Establish central data keeping system to more easily track AT use. |
| | Seek additional staff time, if needed, to follow-up on students using AT. |